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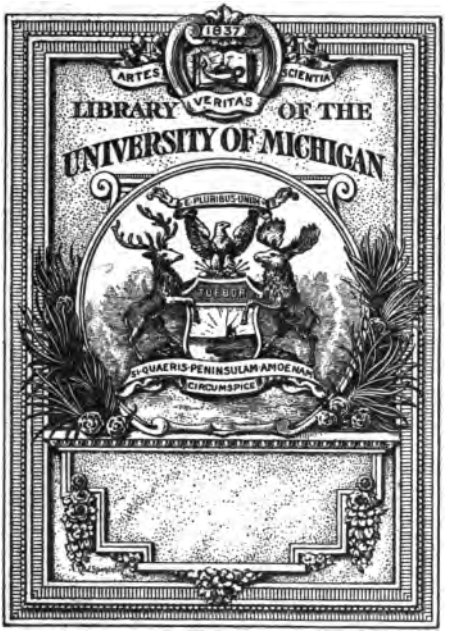
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# CECILIA GONZAGA

# CECILIA GONZAGA

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BY

R. C. TREVELYAN

AUTHOR OF "POLYPHEMUS" AND OTHER POEMS

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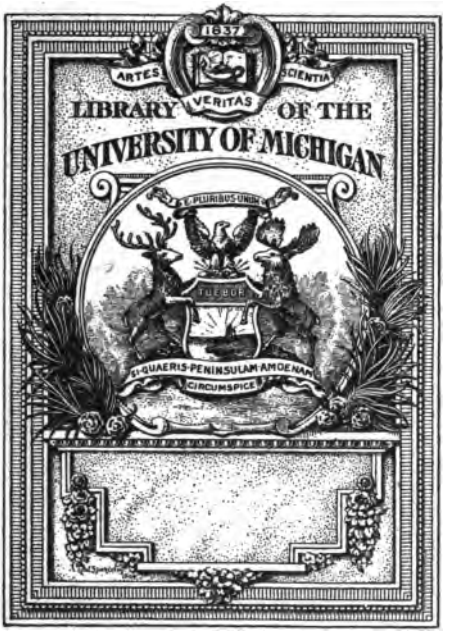
*TO MY WIFE*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*

# CECILIA GONZAGA

That when my daughter hears your character
Profaned and tainted by outrageous slander,
Her nature should shrink back and seek escape
From her affianced lord, as though he were in truth
What now, I trust, he doth but falsely seem?

ANTONIO

Indeed, I find it strange—most strange, my lord,
She welcomes these preposterous hearsay charges,
Mere malice of insinuating tongues.
And even were such reports in some part true,
To what would this amount, save that I choose
My friends to please myself and no man else,
Not even his Eminence, and that these friends
Are men of spirit, and no puritans?
'Tis not to bring discredit on my court
To say 'tis gay—that all men there may use
What wholesome social liberty they please.
I grant it is no cloister; and 'tis that
Maybe condemns it in my bride's strict eyes—
That doubtless; since her mad caprice still holds
To take the veil and so escape her duty.

GONZAGA

None can regret more deeply than I do
This strange unhappy whim, which yet proceeds

From no perverse contrarious stubbornness,
But from a settled, serious desire;
Which to defeat I know no surer means
Than to convince her that the world has erred
Heeding these tales—that foolish world, my lord,
That, spying smoke, will ever shriek out fire:
Which ancient proverb I would take and turn
To this more kindly, charitable sense,
And say, we men have souls like winter fires,
Now high now low by turns. The first young flames
That set the chimney roaring, soon sink down,
Ill-tended, to a few thin trembling jets,
Last flicker out, and nought is left alive
Save the charred timber's red and glowing cubes,
They too fast fading 'neath an ashen film.
Yet stir the logs, or ply the bellows' breath,
Quickening in a trice, the flames leap up,
And dancing high spread pleasure through the room.
So is it with the soul's Promethean fire,
Fitful and prompt to dwindle, yet as swift
And sudden to revive. Then let my words
Come as a timely breath, and fan to flames
Your smouldering virtue. From this hour shake off—
Refute these slanders, showing forth your soul's
Authentic nobler substance to the world,

Which with short easy memory soon forgets
The sorry past at sight of golden change.
By these sole true and honourable means,
Trust me, can you win back my daughter's love.
Now ponder well my words, and fare you well.

ANTONIO

I will indeed, my lord.

[*Exit* GONZAGA.

Presuming, puritanic fool!
Thou old grave moralising hypocrite!
Thus to be lessoned! Thus to be brow-beaten!
Now by God's bones, may the gout rack thy joints
For this! But not, by heaven,
Till I am past reach of thy scolding tongue
Safe in my duchy with thy dainty daughter.

[*Enter* MANFREDI.

Here comes Manfredi, in good time to console me.

MANFREDI

Why, what's the matter now?

ANTONIO

The matter! You and I must part, my friend.

MANFREDI

We part, my lord?

ANTONIO

Yes, I must banish thee.
The reign of Saints is come: there is no place
For such as thee henceforth about my court.
Get hence, thou "old accomplished libertine"!
Mislead no more my frail and pliant youth.
Get thee behind me, thou seducing Satan!

MANFREDI

"Accomplished libertine"!
That savours of the Marquis' mordant phrase.
Has he then been at pains to waste his breath
In homilies o'er you and your ill ways?

ANTONIO

My blood still boils.

MANFREDI

Come, take it not to heart.
Parents will still be parents: such the price
You pay for their fair daughters and their dower.
I have a keen-nosed, vicious-tempered dog,

Who, when he finds and brings me in my game,
Will oft hold back, nor drop it straight away,
And, when he does, will snarl and show his teeth.
If I have pouched the bird his skill retrieved,
Why should I grudge the useful brute his spleen?
Trust me, Gonzaga will not break his faith:
This pretty bird will soon be yours. Bear with him:
Doubtless his gout has made him choleric.
Then let him bluster—laugh we in our sleeves.

ANTONIO

'Twas scarce a laughing matter, friend, believe me.
But say he means me well, what must I think
Of my fastidious bride, who treats me still
With undisguised disdain and studied loathing?
Were it mere girlish humorsome dislike,
'Twould signify but little—that would pass.
But this young upstart Braccio—what of him?
The worse for him, if he should prove the cause.
Do I not prick the mischief to the quick?

MANFREDI

Maybe he is the cause. Yet for his sake
I could well wish it might prove otherwise.

ANTONIO

What! you, Manfredi, you his lover too?
Has he bewitched you too, as all else here?
Fain would I hear more of this wondrous youth.
Pray tell me, was he not
The great Perugian Fortebraccio's bastard?

MANFREDI

"Bastard"! Why bastard?

ANTONIO

Nay, who doubts him that?

MANFREDI

Give devils their due: allow they are true-born.
So Braccio was; though ere yet two years old
Left orphan by his father's fall at Aquila,
And by his mother's dying hope bequeathed
To Vittorino's care, who in his house
Brought him up with uncalled-for love, and after
At his own charge received him in his school;
Where he was bred in equal fellowship
With Italy's noblest blood, and the young colts
And fillies of this dangerous Mantuan house.

ANTONIO

It makes me sick to think he had such luck.
Tell me of things that thwart him, good Manfredi.

MANFREDI

Admire thine enemy,
And thou shalt be promoted to a skirt;
For all who trail them are quite lost for him.

ANTONIO

Oh, sits the wind that way? Come, say at once,
Doubtless he's fingered at Cecilia's heart.
She loves him, say it.

MANFREDI

Well, it is but love.
He's had no more than thought and speech can give,
If he have had so much. Doubtless he's hot;
But either she was cold and over-nice,
Or both most deep: no scandal got abroad.
So when ambition and his father's spirit
Impelled him forth to carve his fortunes out,
He being gone, whoe'er might nose the wind,

Or think he stole too often down some passage,
They soon forgot their vain sagacity:
Nor do I think Cecilia moped for long.
But when this year he came again to Mantua,
Already crowned with military fame,
This smouldering love, it seems, flamed up anew;
And for this cause, though little here is stirring,
He lingers on, while the unsuspecting father,
Proud to be served by so renowned a soldier,
Makes much of him, promises, coaxes, flatters,
Tries all means to retain him in his service.

ANTONIO

The subtle fox! The Marquis must be warned.

MANFREDI

Small good would come of that. We have no proof:
And without proof—so absolute his faith
In Braccio's honour—he'd believe no word.

ANTONIO

What, then, is to be done? Advise me, Manfredi. Must I provoke him to a quarrel?

MANFREDI

That's good, upon my soul! Are you crazed? His strength and skill are notorious: there is a formidable witchcraft in his weapon's point which I, for one, would not face; yet I am no fool with my rapier either. You challenge Braccio, indeed!

ANTONIO

Then poison him, poison him!

MANFREDI

No, no; a happy device indeed would that be to recommend yourself in Cecilia's eyes. Make away with Braccio because you suspect him to be her lover! Trust me, if she has ever had the least breath of affection for him, even so much as the love sigh of a mouse, she will weep her eyes out over him when he is dead, and her suspicions will at once fly up and fasten upon you as the contriver of her paramour's murder. No, it would be the death of all your hopes. Have patience; bide your time.

ANTONIO

There is but chill comfort in this advice. But

how is she disposed towards him? Does she in very truth love him?

MANFREDI

Indeed, she shows him no manifest affection or favour; rather seems to avoid him, baffling and eluding all private occasion of interview. But what she veritably may be thinking in that demure head of hers, who knows? A young girl's mind is like the path of a fish through clear water: we can see it here one moment, there the next, but none can predict, explain, or observe its trace with a close eye: it is utterly unimaginable. I have often seen a trout lie watching a bait, still as a pebble, and give no sign awhile which way its fancy is working; then, in the twinkling of an eye, either 'tis gone out of sight, or the bait is taken and your trout hooked. So it is in general with women. Only bide your time. Leave all to me. I will endeavour to come by the truth. It may be she cares nothing for him now, but has in all sincereness set her heart upon entering her nunnery, in which most vexatious folly she has been countenanced by her mother and by that officious old pedagogue Vittorino. It may be Braccio has indeed been in part the cause; but a timely hint

or a threat from me may teach him the wisdom of prudence. If not, we discover some fact that may compromise him with the Marquis, or, if need be, inveigle him into some folly which may bring him to disgrace, so send him hence discredited, with hopes broken. But come into the palace; I see some one approaching.

ANTONIO

Braccio himself, and Ludovico with him! I hate that cross-grained, ill-mannerly brother of hers.

MANFREDI

But why? I hear he is an accomplished and courteous gentleman.

ANTONIO

I suspect him to have done me many a slanderous ill-turn with his sister. Besides, he is Braccio's most intimate friend; is not that reason enough for not loving him?

[ANTONIO *and* MANFREDI *go off towards the Palace.*

[*A few moments later* BRACCIO *and* LUDOVICO *come in slowly from the opposite side.*

LUDOVICO

Walk slowly, Braccio.
First let the Duke and that old courtly Satan
Pass in before us. I would not meet them now:
I should betray my scorn too openly.
I wonder much my father is so blind.
Can he not see what all else see so plain?

BRACCIO

I think he is not blind: he reads the Duke
With a shrewd comment no less just than ours.

LUDOVICO

How can he then endure him in his court?
Why, why consents he not this infamous match
At last be broken off?

BRACCIO

I fear he cannot:
It is the honour of his house constrains him.

LUDOVICO

Honour! I scorn such false, unnatural honour!

The mind of man is nobler than this honour,
When it prescribes him nought but sin and shame.
Is it honour that would have us render up,
Against all conscience, to an infamous man
A sister, reared up in all gentleness?
Oh, shall we vilely cast this flower away
In its rich, new-blown beauty's perfect spring
For swine to tread — and all for this mere name,
This superstition, honour?
What, you are silent? You have nought to answer?
Ah, listen, Braccio; give me earnest heed:
My father can do nought — let me grant that—
He can do nothing, since this spectre honour,
Like false religion, binds his nobler will.
All we are helpless—mother, brother, friends.
Then from her fate she has no refuge left,
Except, perchance, a cloister's living tomb:
And even that cold boon may be denied her.
Thou only art our help, our ultimate hope.
Not in my father's, not in ours—in thine,
The veritable honour of our house
Lies in thy hands. Oh now no more suppress

The imperious impulse of your heart. Speak to her:
What though she would refuse, take no denial,
Compel her to give ear.

BRACCIO

Tempt me not, as you love me! Say no more!

LUDOVICO

Because I love so well both her and thee
'Tis therefore that I urge thee. Let your words
Hold up to her bewildered soul a mirror
Where she may see her inmost hopes revealed:
To this true self plead with her to be loyal,
Plead boldly with a lover's hardihood;
Show her escape in her so desperate need;
Bid her accept your love; she longs to do so:
Nor will she, no, nor can she, say you nay.

BRACCIO

Alas, I know not that.
Small ground have I for hope.
'Tis not her woman's weakness, that must shrink
From hazard of so desperate remedy,
Not that so much I fear; nor can I doubt

The constance of her love. No, 'tis her strength,
The set and steady purpose of her mind
Never to swerve one step from Duty's law,
'Tis this I dread, this that I cannot vanquish.

LUDOVICO

Her father she already has defied.
Was that no lapse from Duty?

BRACCIO

The man her soul abhors she can reject
Obeying higher laws—but this,
That I must urge—
How, by what pleading, can I justify,
How reconcile with Duty in her eyes?
(*A short pause*)
Yet, though my heart misgives, this will I try.
My generous friend, I give thanks that your words
Have nerved my self-distrust to this resolve.
Give me your hand. Whate'er my pleading can,
That will I do.

LUDOVICO

See, as in happy omen, while we speak,
She draws near, deep in talk with Vittorino.

There in that ilex walk
Slip by, keep close, till I can find some means
To draw them off and leave her here alone.
Quick, lest they see you!

[BRACCIO *goes off to the right.*

[CECILIA, PAOLA, *and* VITTORINO *come in from the direction of the Palace.*

CECILIA

But are you sure, if now you intercede,
All you can urge will not incense him more?

VITTORINO

I cannot think so. Your father is no tyrant:
Reason and justice only, or, as now,
Their specious semblance, govern still his mind,
Which, even as conscience bids, turns or is checked
Swift as a vessel answers to her helm.
Once I have plainly shown—

CECILIA

Ah, say no more!
Here is my brother.

[LUDOVICO *comes forward.*

LUDOVICO

Well, sister, well! Why are you all so silent?
A moment since you seemed to be most earnest
In talk together, yet you stop short now
As by my presence checked, and stare upon me
With conscious vacancy. Would you that
I retired?
Am I no longer in your confidence?

CECILIA

No, brother, stay: we will hide nothing from you.
We were debating how I might obtain
Our father's sanction for my hope to join
The sisterhood of Saint Clare.

VITTORINO

And to this end
We think it good that I once more make bold
To be her advocate.

PAOLA

Yes, Vittorino;
Your intercession may prevail to move him.
It often has before, when all else failed.

CECILIA

It is most noble of him so to brave
On my behalf his master's strong displeasure.
I would dissuade him : none but myself in this
Should be my advocate.

LUDOVICO

That matters little.
He is inflexible : nor you, nor he,
Nor any man could move my father now.
Why, he would rather die than grant you that.
No, no, some other refuge than a cloister
Must be devised.

CECILIA

Well then, devise, devise.

LUDOVICO

I will. Now, mother, let me have some talk
With you and Vittorino :
And, meantime, bid my sister to go back
To her rose arbour, where behind the seat,
Slipped down forgotten, she will find her book.

CECILIA

What book? I am sure I left none there to-day.

LUDOVICO

A vellum-bound old pedant of a treatise.
You must have let it drop while dozing o'er it.

CECILIA

He should have brought it, master, should he not?
Tell him he is ungallant, and lacks manners,
And bid him go himself to fetch it home.

VITTORINO

No, no, 'tis you shall go—aye, go you must,
If e'er you'd borrow book of mine again.
What, leave my grave Eusebius out all night,
His goodly cover blistering with damp dews,
Turning his learned pages into pulp,
Crawled over and beslimed by slugs and snails!
For shame, Cecilia!

CECILIA

I cannot think I have.
Yet if, through fault of mine, the holy father
Should take a chill, how could I hope for pardon?

[*Exit* CECILIA. *The others move away to the left, towards the Palace. When the stage is empty, re-enter* BRACCIO.

BRACCIO

She will pass back this way.
Here will I wait her then.
There is no looking back, no doubting now.
Too long, at issue between desperate hopes
And no less desperate fears, have I delayed,
Day after day put off. Yet even now
These fears oppress me. What if she will not listen—
Or listening will not yield!
I will not think it even.
Or yet worse doubt, what if she yield, and then
I draw some frightful ruin on her head,
Some deadly curse to blast both her and me!
Have I such right to tempt her to these perils?
Has even love such right?—Ah, she is coming.
Now, in her presence, I can doubt no more.

[*Re-enter* CECILIA.

CECILIA

How, Braccio! What is this?
So I perceive you are in league together.
This is unworthy of you. Let me pass.

BRACCIO

I cannot let you pass till you have heard me.

CECILIA

Not pass till I have heard you! Braccio, Braccio!
I do not choose to be compelled to listen
By you or any man.

BRACCIO

Oh hear me now.
Now this one time, if never else again.
I will be brief. There is no time to lose:
The Duke is urgent—will not brook delay;
Your father can no more gainsay his claim.
Within this month (from his own lips I heard it),
This very month, your marriage is decreed.
There is no refuge, no reprieve, no hope.
Aye, to hope now would be more vain, more idle
Than taking thought how to outstrip by flight
This lengthening twilight creeping o'er the plains
From yonder sinking sun. Yet still one way—

One way alone is left, would you escape
Your fate's relentless shadow, closing in.
What this must be, you know. Oh then resolve
Ere 'tis too late—

CECILIA

No, Braccio, say no more—

BRACCIO

Accept, accept my love, and let it save you
From tyranny, from wrong, from a rash vow,
Yes, from yourself and what is forced upon you.

CECILIA

Alas, what is it you would have me do?

BRACCIO

If ever childish friendship in us both
Grew blamelessly from opening leaf and bud
To conscious love's perfected flower; if ever
The music of our secret interviews,
Love's first confessions whispered timidly,
Sounded to each more sweet, more magical
Than first-heard preludes of the thrush in spring—

If all those vows with which we fed our souls
Had meaning then, or still have life and force
Not wholly yet decayed, nor faded out
From time-starved memory—oh, if you still
Can love as once you loved—then fly with me:
Accept my service—let me take you hence
To some safe refuge, where, beyond pursuit,
We may by marriage lawfully frustrate
And cancel claims of tyrannous pretenders.
Suffer no thought of failure or mischance
To daunt you: once with noble hope resolved,
This hazardous enterprise will seem as easy
As to the free wave-wandering birds of ocean
Their fearless storm-drenched flight. There is no danger
In life or death for those who love and hope.
Oh speak, Cecilia!

(*A pause*)

Our flight accomplished, in some safe retreat,
Venice or Milan, we may wait the issue,
Assured of reconcilement late or soon.
My house is noble, and my name renowned;
My friends are many: doubt not that ere long
Your father's love and pardon will be ours.
Oh speak, Cecilia!

CECILIA

What shall I say!
Braccio, to that which you would have me do
I never can consent: it must not be.
But do not think me false—not false to thee.
Nay, though our ruthless destiny disjoin us,
Oh, yet believe, dear friend,
That as I first did love, so do I now,
So ever shall. Though that in me be sin,
As I must partly think, yet 'tis a sin
I never can shake off: made one with me
Soon must it pass within a cloister's peace,
There, veiled in the sad habit of a nun,
Stay with me till I die.

BRACCIO

Is love a sin?
How can that be?

CECILIA

No, in itself it is not.
To me it was already from the first.
For from my childhood had I been betrothed,
Irrevocably bound by holiest vows,
Almost a wife, in all but name and thought.

Forgetting this, I sinned : and for this cause
You suffer now, while I repent in vain.

BRACCIO

Yet if from these irrevocable vows
You seek release now for a cloister's sake,
How much the more should they not be despised
And set aside at sovereign love's command ?

CECILIA

To sovereign love so far can I be loyal,
But no step further. I can reject the Duke
Despite my father's will, even had I else
No just right to abhor him, as Heaven knows
I have abundant reason. From my pledge
My conscience can sincerely find release
By this one honourable way alone.
Thither of late my thoughts have been inclined,
Till, grown familiar with what first had seemed
Necessity, I now accept and welcome
This cloistered life with gladness and a mind
Serious and calm. Ere long, I feel assured,
My father will relent and grant my wish.
Nor can I well believe he now intends
To force this marriage on me : for such cruelty
He is too loving and too just a father.

BRACCIO

So just and loving! How then should he fail
Soon to forgive a fault so pardonable?

CECILIA

Oh, do not think that I could trespass so
Against the duty and the love I owe him
As by my secret flight to set at nought
His wounded honour and authority,
Forfeiting his affection, as must be,
Should I contrive and practise this deceit—
I who my whole life long, in word or act,
Deceived him never yet, nor e'er found need.
Then, Braccio, do not tempt me more in vain.
Though every word is as a stone to bruise
And crush my heart, they cannot shake my mind.
For pity's sake, dear friend, urge me no more.

BRACCIO

Beware that subtle peril which so oft
Besets with fatal snares the noblest minds.
There is no human action nor resolve,
No enterprise of moment, be its need
However clear and righteous in truth's eye,

But forthwith scruples and untimely doubts
Rise, like a blinding vapour, to unnerve
The daunted conscience and perplex the will.
So mingled are the seeds of human things,
Evil and good blent unobservably,
That, should we stay to sift and sort our grain,
The time of sowing would be come and gone,
Ere we had filled our sacks, or cast in hope
One handful o'er the earth. It needs must be
That what we do, though well and wisely done,
Will somewhere cause offence. Forget not this,
Cecilia: be not lured from your true good
By these thought-woven phantoms that usurp
The name of Duty.

(*A short pause*)

Why do you turn away?
Why do you fix your gaze so earnestly
Westward on yonder vacant evening sky?

CECILIA

Come and stand by me here. Do you see that star?

BRACCIO

What star? I can see none.

CECILIA

Ah, but I do, quite clear—up yonder, see,
Steadfastly shining with unblinking eye
Of brightening silver through the fading blue.
Can you not see it now?

BRACCIO

No, I see nothing.

CECILIA

How strange! To me it seems so plain. But search
Yet more intensely: first mark yon white tower,
The belfry of St. Clare; thence lift your eyes—

BRACCIO

Ah, now I see it too—so very clear,
My wonder is it seemed so hard to find.

CECILIA

Since I could find it first, it shall be mine:
And I will make it serve me prettily,
Turning its shining thus to suit my need
Into bright similes: for I will call it
The emblem of my duty, my hope's star,

Set there aloft and stationed in the sky
By God's own loving hand, serene in beauty,
To give me help and light in my sore doubt.
Moreover quite distinct, even from the first,
But to me only; others it eludes:
Yet, when I point and bid them search, they too
In time, by gazing hard, can make it out:
Then it shines forth conspicuous and bright
For their eyes as for mine.

BRACCIO

Ah no, I find
Your stern astronomy in error here.
This is not Duty's cold and pallid star,
As you in vain would have it: no, believe me,
This is that star of love, that ardent lamp
Which Venus lights each eve and lifts on high
To cheer her votaries, and bless with hope
All eyes upturned in worship of her might.
This is that star towards which, since Wisdom's birth,
The wise have travelled from the ends of the world:
This beaconed Paris o'er the seas to Greece;
Its beams each night lit Hero's lamp of love;
Far in the East Prince Rudel saw it rise,
And straight, inspired by noble faith, took ship

And steering towards it, ere he died, attained
Great bliss and durable praise. Misname it not,
But rather hail its kindly light with me.

CECILIA

For all your eloquence, my poor sad star,
Since it is mine, good friend, must still retain
That staid and sober name I gave it first.
But truly those brave instances you brought,
Though on my side most just and apposite,
Seem to your sense equivocal indeed,
And rather go to prove your star of love
A beacon of calamity and death.
Moreover mark how soon our fatal star
(Take it to symbolise whate'er you will)
Must set behind the convent of St. Clare.

BRACCIO

Well now a truce
To these vain strifes and pedantries of fancy.
Wit oft tastes bitter spent on earnest themes.
Then I will say no more—at least not now.

CECILIA

Nor now, nor afterward! You will not, friend?
Promise me, Braccio.

BRACCIO

How can I promise that?
But we had best be careful.
Some one is not far off. I had supposed
There was none else besides us in the garden.

CECILIA

Then let me go in first.

BRACCIO

I will stay here and set my doubts at rest
Who this ill-boding twilight bird may be.
[*Exit* CECILIA *toward the Palace.*
Is it the Duke? I think not so—Manfredi!
How if he overheard!
[MANFREDI *comes forward from the right.*

MANFREDI

Come, my lord Duke, 'tis close on supper time.

BRACCIO

How, sir!

MANFREDI

I fear I give offence. I am most loath
To have broken on your private interview.
What, Signior Braccio!—Nay then, pardon me:
This dusk deceived me: I took you for the Duke.
Who would have thought to find another here
In secret twilight talk with his betrothed?
But have no fear; I shall not blab one word.

BRACCIO

Now, sir, have done this jesting: 'tis ill-timed,
And insolent too. I think you know me well.

MANFREDI

I am not here to insult or spy upon you, but to do you a service. Will you listen to a friend's advice?

BRACCIO

Heaven keep me from such friends!

MANFREDI

Arrogance ill becomes one in the shadow of peril such as overhangs you now. I am here in all honest friendliness to give you warning.

BRACCIO

Then be brief.

MANFREDI

Brief and plain too; and if my outspokenness give offence, why then, offence must be of your making, not mine. My friend, Duke Antonio, having, as the world knows, lost or failed to obtain the affection of his betrothed lady, and not discovering in his own perfections sufficient reason for this calamity, concludes that what he has never forfeited nor knowingly cast away must of necessity have been robbed from him. He is in no humour to let this rest without more scrutiny, nor, if he find himself thwarted or wronged, to forego vengeance. Give him more cause for suspicion, and I would not answer for your life. Take my advice: walk with caution for the present: be wary and patient. Ere long the Duke must either win or renounce her altogether. Thereafter I wish you well, and will drink to your good success very heartily. But your time has not yet come. It consists but doubtfully with my loyalty to warn you thus; but I served your father in every field, from St. Egidio to Aquila; and no

man who has fought under so noble and generous a captain as the great Montone, could stand by and see—

BRACCIO

Go tell the Duke your master,
If he has any just ground of complaint,
Or any supposed cause of controversy
And quarrel with me, then let him come himself
In person, to demand due satisfaction.
Or let him send some honourable man
To claim redress—

MANFREDI

Say rather some wise man,
Since that is now your need—a man of sense,
To teach you prudence.

BRACCIO

—Some honourable man,
Tell him—and not a traitor, such as one
I know that there is now about his person,
Who (since great captains must unknowingly
Be served by villains oft) served once my father,
Till he, unmasking some gross crime of his,

I know not what, with public ignominy
Cashiered him; yet, alas, in evil hour,
With a too credulous hardihood of trust,
As ever was his noble nature's wont,
Pardoned and took him back: and 'tis reported,
His was the hand whose base ingratitude
At Aquila struck in my father's neck
The spear-thrust from behind, from which he died.
Howe'er the likelihood of that may be,
This tell your lord, the truth of which I vouch,
'Tis known Gismondo Malatesta's gold
Makes fat and heavy this same traitor's purse
On whom so lovingly he leans his trust.

[*Exit* BRACCIO.

MANFREDI

The fiend for this clutch down thy soul to hell!
And yet, poor petulant fool, why should I curse
him?
I came sincerely purposed to befriend him:
But his own reckless words have doomed him now.
His father's murderer, that I never was:
But for the rest, 'twas true. Better for him
Had it been false: then he might live; not now.
Death must stop fast his mouth, that else might
well

Expose this dangerous double game I play
For Malatesta's gold—how I corrupt
And lead this wretched vicious cub, Antonio,
The swift way on to infamy and ruin.
Yes, he must die.—And yet
How like his father was that frown, the scorn
That glanced from his eye and wreathed his comely
lip!
So like in all things, beauty, strength and pride!
Yet not like him discreet! So much the worse.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

# ACT II

*A State-room in the Palace of the* GONZAGAS.

*Enter* PAOLA *and* VITTORINO.

PAOLA

Heaven grant your mediation may prevail,
At least to obtain deferment for this time.
It is his wilful humour, when opposed,
To grow the more impatient and perverse.

VITTORINO

Trust me to use all serviceable tact,
Lest over-anxious and imprudent zeal,
Like an unskilled physician, aggravate
The fever it would cure.

*Enter* CECILIA *hastily, and as though out of breath with running.*

PAOLA

Cecilia !
Why, what's the matter, child ?

CECILIA

Let me sit down first, and get back my breath.
I have run the whole way here.

PAOLA

But what has happened ?

CECILIA

Oh, it was in my bower,
Where I was sitting, reading all alone,
When suddenly a strange oppressive scent,
Like a breath wafted from a barber's door,
Was all about me, overwhelming quite
The delicate fragrance of my arbour's flowers.
Wondering, I raised my eyes : there stood the Duke
Before me with his falcon on his wrist,
Twirling a roll of papers in his hands,
Which, as I rose in haste, he tendered me

With such absurd grimacing gallantry,
Urging acceptance with such bombast phrase
Of vain premeditated compliment,
That, but for anger, I had laughed outright.
At last, to make an end, I took his sheets—
A brace of sonnets neatly copied out—
Glanced o'er some elegant insipid lines,
Then, in disgust at such impertinence,
I made as though about to tear them—thus:
And so I should indeed—but with an oath
He roughly seized my wrist and held it fast:
But I, enraged, broke from his brutal grasp,
And flung his own vile sonnets in his face;
Then while his frighted falcon flapped its wings,
And he all flustered and dumfounded stood,
I, slipping quickly past him, fled here safe.
But, mother, say, why, why must I endure
This odious man's repulsive impudence?
How long must I submit to be so pestered?

PAOLA

Alas, dear child, I would to Heaven we knew.

VITTORINO

Do not lose heart. Here are two who mean
To stand your good friends still, whate'er bechance.

*Enter* GONZAGA *in conversation with* BRACCIO *and* LUDOVICO. VITTORINO *moves with* PAOLA *and* CECILIA *to the back of the stage, where they are seen talking together apart.*

GONZAGA

Three thousand horse—all we can hope to muster
At so short summons—four days at the most.
Yet, boldly handled, these should well suffice you
At least to save Cremona, nay, scare back,
To their own marsh these croaking frogs of Venice.
Just such a piece of work as most I loved
In better days; and could so now, by God,
Did but the gout consent. Pray Heaven, young Braccio,
To be delivered from that curse—aye, rather
To be cut off in youth and health to-morrow,
Than drag life out in crippled martyrdom,
With will and brain yet sound and unimpaired,
Condemned idly to watch the stirring things
You young men do. Oh, 'tis too pitiable!

BRACCIO

Would that you still could take the field, my lord!
I had been proud to serve 'neath such a master.

GONZAGA

Each dog must have his day, and mine is done.
'Tis better so. Be it my solace now
To see you in my service vindicate
That noble fame which is your heritage.

BRACCIO

In truth, my lord, I feel too young by far
For a command so great and critical.

LUDOVICO

Father, I beg, let me not stay behind,
Nor pass this fortunate occasion by
For learning my first warlike lesson now
With my best friend for master.

GONZAGA

No, Ludovico:
You are yet too young. Another time, not now.

LUDOVICO

But why, father?
Am I not older than my brother Carlo,
Who yet has served the whole last summer through
With Piccinino? I pray you let me go.

GONZAGA

I have said you must not go : let that suffice.
Since you would be a soldier, you should learn
Silent obedience is a soldier's duty.

BRACCIO (*apart to* GONZAGA)

I would, my lord, I could prevail with you
To let me take him. Surely by this time
He is old enough : and I would pawn my life
To bring him safely home.

GONZAGA

No, Braccio, no ;
It is not that. I had indeed some mind
To send him with you, had he shown himself
Somewhat less forward and importunate.
Indeed he has displeased me much of late
By his insolence, speaking his mind unasked
On this and that, opposing openly
His sister's marriage—bearing himself moreover
With moody disrespect towards her betrothed.
Till he has learnt obedience and good manners,
It is my will that he should bide at home.

BRACCIO

I urge no further, sir : you should judge best.

GONZAGA

Where is the Duke? Cecilia,
When next you see him, bid him be prepared
To be an early riser with us all
To-morrow morning. The foresters and grooms
Have had their orders: all day long we hunt
The western woods; when twilight darkens sport,
All towards Goito northward turn our reins:
A bounteous supper shall attend us there,
And beds made soft by toil. The Duke and you
Must be our leaders in the chase this day,
Which is to inaugurate the festive season,
That in your nuptial hour so soon must end.

CECILIA

My nuptial hour, father?

GONZAGA

And why not, pray?
It scarce can now much longer be put off.
The Duke has shown a noble grace of mild
Forbearing patience. Nor sorts it with my honour
That we delay beyond this present month.

CECILIA

Father, though it must grieve me to the heart
To be at variance with your least desire,
God knows I have no choice.
'Tis my resolve, from which I ne'er have flinched,
Never to wed the Duke nor any man,
But to retire to some religious house
Where my betrothal vows, which bound my childhood
Ere it attained a reasonable age,
May be revoked by other holier vows—
Solemnly cancelled. This you long have known :
And therefore, father, I entreat you now,
Spare me this bitterness, nor further urge
My thoughts to that one thing they shrink from most.

GONZAGA

Do you mean this, Cecilia ?

CECILIA

Oh, am I wont
To let my tongue speak what I do not mean ?

GONZAGA

Betrothal vows, so sanctified and blessed
By Holy Church, can only be revoked
With grievous loss of honour to our house.
To save your own, these words you must unsay.

CECILIA

I cannot, sir.

GONZAGA

Nay then, proud stubborn girl,
I well perceive, whatever thou hast seemed,
Thou art perverse, self-willed, undutiful.
You have no reason, no, not one, to give,
Why you should not, as is your bounden duty,
Perform what you have vowed.

VITTORINO

My lord, forbear:
I pray you be not so ungentle with her:
See how she shrinks, confounded even to tears
By your rebuke. Then must I speak for her.
My lord, she has good reasons, serious, true,
As you should know.

GONZAGA

Silence, Vittorino!
I do not need your counsel.

VITTORINO

Were I silent,
Now when, for lack of counsel, you will do
That, which I know, you must repent hereafter—
If now without remonstrance I stood by,
That were no honest love or loyalty,
But cringing, pusillanimous respect,
And shameful cowardice.

GONZAGA

Now by God's eyes, old man,
You had best beware! What, has it come to this,
That I must be brow-beaten and defied
By a schoolmaster, one who eats my bread,
My own dependant, salaried and pensioned!
No, 'tis too much. Was it then all for this
I spent my money with ungrudging hand,
That you should teach my children how to use
Impudent sophistries, and bandy words
With their own father! With what cunning art

This girl, egged on and countenanced by you,
Has learnt to dress in robes of martyrdom
The shame of disobedience and revolt!

VITTORINO

My lord Gonzaga, these twenty years and more
I have served you faithfully, and, as you say,
Eaten your bread and been your pensioner:
And this is why both love and duty now
Embolden me to speak despite your anger.
Do what you will, imprison my old age,
Or turn it forth a beggar on the world,
Nay take my life, but think not I will cease
To warn you against injustice whilst I breathe.

GONZAGA

No, Vittorino—your tried integrity
And noble worth deserved not this of me.
Yet must I think indeed
Your judgment here gone grievously astray.
Were not her hand irrevocably plighted,
Even then could I consent she should abjure
Her home, her friends, all human intercourse,
And all her noble privilege of life,
To waste in barrenness her youth and beauty,

Immured within a cloister's chill retreat?
Then let no more be said. Reflect, Cecilia,
And reconcile your mind to what must be.
Good Vittorino, will you come with us?
And Braccio too, for I shall want you soon.
We must make ripe our plans—leave nought to chance,
If we would give Venetian pride a fall.

[*Exeunt all but* CECILIA *and* LUDOVICO.

LUDOVICO

Sister—

CECILIA

Yes, Ludovico.
We must have patience. All may yet be well.

LUDOVICO

No, sister, no, talk not of patience now.
Out upon this fool patience! Would you have it
Drag you to church, thrust on your hand the ring,
Forcibly push down your reluctant head
To an assenting nod? All this, make sure,
Will patience, meek and dovelike patience, do,
Your own most certain foe, the fatal pander

To the vile Duke; whom, if you would not marry—
But tell me, sister, are you constant quite
Even to the bitter utmost to withstand
Our father's tyranny?

CECILIA

How can you doubt?
Why do you ask me this?

LUDOVICO

Then be convinced
That now in flight alone your safety lies.
You know our father: do not feed vain hopes
That reason may at length prevail with pride.
Even noble Vittorino's brave reproof
Could but a little curb and put to shame
His violence, but could not bend his mind,
No, not a hair's-breadth, from its hardened will.

CECILIA

Where then and whither would you have me fly?

LUDOVICO

Myself and Braccio will concert the means.

CECILIA

No, brother, never will I give consent
If in this project Braccio bears a part.

LUDOVICO

And why not? Is he not my friend and yours?

CECILIA

How then could I permit our friend to share
In this conspiracy on my behalf
Against the lord he serves? Such thankless treason
Assuredly would earn for just reward
Disaster and disgrace.

LUDOVICO

By such as Braccio
Fortune and favour soon may be retrieved:
And honour in your cause he cannot lose,
Since to your service, as full well you know,
He has devoted honour, fortune, fame,
Even life itself.

CECILIA

No, I would have him stay.
I will not stand between him and his duty.

Should I by my extremity be wrought
To this consent, none but yourself, dear brother,
Must be my flight's accomplice—no man else.
But leave me now some little breathing-time,
Some short pause to reflect. This thought it is
Most checks me — what disgrace, what bitter wrath
Your noble love and generosity
Must by my rescue earn.

LUDOVICO

Pause not for that.
I care not for my father's anger now.
No, let him storm his fill, banish, disown me,
Take Carlo for his heir instead of me,
To stay at home instead; I'd thank him for it.
You heard how he refused my just request
To go with Braccio? I tell you, then and there
I straight resolved to steal away myself
To Piccinino's camp; and so by Heaven
I mean to do; for I am sick to the soul
Of living a perpetual schoolboy here,
Yawning o'er books and twirling weary thumbs,
And trifling so my best of youth away.

CECILIA

But what's this to the purpose of my flight?
Would you then take me with you to the wars
To make your squire?

LUDOVICO

Upon my soul, why not?
I swear your heart is every whit as brave,
And in the saddle you are full as bold
As many a so-called soldier I have seen.
Let's turn your jest to earnest; come, a camp's
A pleasanter and better refuge far
Than any nunnery: take my word for that.

CECILIA

No, no, good brother.
To Milan take me with you first, and there,
In some religious house, secretly lodge me.
Then go your ways, and prosperous luck be yours.
Thus may we both find shelter from the storm
Till brighter days shall dawn.

LUDOVICO

Maybe the Duke
Will in disgust release you from your pledge.

CECILIA

Well, let us hope it fervently ; and then
Our father may be reconciled, I trust,
And grant us pardon both.

LUDOVICO

Do not doubt that.
To-morrow then we'll steal away.

CECILIA

So soon ?

LUDOVICO

Yes, yes, to-morrow ; all things point to that.
To give the slip unnoticed and unmissed
Should be so easy then. I will provide fresh mounts
And will appoint a place. Were we discovered,
Pursuit could be but slack, all horses spent
And jaded by the chase. So good a chance
Will scarce come twice before your wedding day.

CECILIA

Well, let it be so then. God help us both !

LUDOVICO

'Tis almost dark: I have no time to lose.
Much is to do before to-morrow's dawn.

[*Exit* LUDOVICO.

CECILIA (*after a moment's interval*)

Ludovico!
Oh, I have been too hasty!
Come back, brother!
He is gone! No, still I hear his step retreating.
Shall I go after him and call him back?
What shall I say to him, then?
That I will stay and be Urbino's bride?
No, God forbid, not that!—What then?
Is there no other hope, kind saints in heaven,
No other means save this—to forsake all,
Home, mother, friends, all that I hold most dear,
With no farewell, without one word of blessing?
Ah, sweet Saint Clare, have pity! since thou too
Of old hast borne this cross, thy holy feet
Have trod this bitter pilgrimage before me.
On me too then have pity: give me strength.
Sorely I need thine aid;
For sorely am I tried.
By doubt distracted on every side and tempted.
For see, so weak I am, my very thoughts,

Subtly seduced, turn traitors to my will.
I had thought to drive love from my heart for ever :
Yet still he stands without, and like a starved
And naked child in winter weather, knocks
And pleads so very piteously, my heart
Even now is moved almost to let love in.
What if he spoke true ?
What if indeed love be not sin at all,
But, being divine, and to itself a law,
Transcends and overrules all other laws,
All duties else, in its divinity ?
It may be so : with such a doubt at heart
How could I face him now ? For hitherto
I have been open with him and sincere
In word and thought. Could I still be so now ?
No, no, it is too late, too late for doubt.
I must put by such promptings of the heart,
Specious and doublefaced, and think them sin.
Let this thought give me strength, who am most weak,
And in the hour of trial faith to stand.

[*Enter* BRACCIO. *It is now almost dark.* MANFREDI *comes in unnoticed soon after* BRACCIO, *and remains hidden in the back of the stage till the end of the scene.*

How, Ludovico ; are you come back so soon ?

BRACCIO

Cecilia!

CECILIA

Is it you, Braccio?

BRACCIO

Yes.

(*A short pause*)

I met your brother coming hence but now.

CECILIA

He told you our resolve?

BRACCIO

He told me all.

CECILIA

Say, do you think our project wisely planned?

BRACCIO

I think Ludovico will not fail, but yet
I cannot think him wise.

CECILIA

And why not wise?

BRACCIO

There is now no need for Ludovico's flight.
I have besought your father earnestly,
And he consents this time to let him serve.
'Twould be mere madness now by such an act
For him to offend his father, who might well,
Tempted by anger, cast him from his love,
Banished and disinherited perhaps.

CECILIA

Why then he must not go.
'Tis well you told me this: I thank you, Braccio.
So I must go without him.
Yet what should hinder him, when I set forth,
From being there at hand to say farewell,
Bringing fresh horses and some trusty guide?
If we are wary, none need ever know.

BRACCIO

Even for such a risk there is no need.
I must provide for all, and be your escort.

CECILIA

No, never, Braccio ; never would I suffer
That you, who serve my father, should conspire
Against him thus, to your own loss and shame.

BRACCIO

No man may serve two masters : I have chosen.
Love only is the lord I serve henceforth :
And in his service gladly will I bear
Loss and dishonour, shame and death itself.

CECILIA

But this is madness, Braccio.

BRACCIO

It may be :
Then 'tis a madness I must glory in,
Since it has magic to ennoble life,
Aye, and to give a meaning to life's dark,
Wearisome wilderness of sordid hours.
How often has not Love's rapt faith and fervour
Shriven the soul's despair, and sanctified
Even death's oncoming gloom ! Love breaks the
bonds

From captives, and holds wide the prison-doors,
Beckoning with looks that plead of liberty,
Which in a moment, like some change in dream,
Rekindles life with hope. Think this no madness;
But rather think it madness to remain
Abject and servile to fatality.
Be wise in time : it is not yet too late.

CECILIA

It is too late, too late indeed.

BRACCIO

Nay then,
Your words confess there might have been a time
When it was not too late. Since that time was,
It yet can live again : with you alone
It rests to give it life, speak but one word.

CECILIA

That word I cannot speak.
Be generous and forbear.
Leave unbewailed what might have been, and turn
Rather to that which yet may nobly be.
For I must leave the world, and bid farewell
Both to its glories and its vanities,

And to thyself, dear friend—to thee, who art
Oh, not its vanity, but its chief pride,
Its noblest glory—I go hence; but thou
Art now but setting forth to run thy race
In all men's eyes, ennobling and ennobled:
And as the moon will still live on awhile
In the sun's sky, a scarce regarded film
Of fading whiteness, lingering towards her setting,
So in your memory may I still live on,
Remembered, not regretted—oh, not that:
Since things of baser worth, that have no value
Except they be possessed, those we regret:
But love is not of those. As in God's eye
Religion has most worth—is purest then,
When without witness, dumb, and starved of praise,
Alone in the heart's secrecy it dwells,
So may it be with love. Such love be ours.
For me indeed it must be so; this sin,
If sin it be, I trust to be forgiven,
As now I trust thou wilt forgive me, Braccio.

BRACCIO

Oh, what should I forgive?

CECILIA

There is so much.

BRACCIO

That thou hast caused my love? That needs no pardon.

CECILIA

Yet it has brought you sorrow.

BRACCIO

What of that?
Shall we judge love by scales of joy and sorrow?

CECILIA

Yet to the uttermost I grieve you now,
And wrong your generous love, rejecting that
Which you would have me do.

BRACCIO

Thou knowest well
That I forgive thee.
I have more need for pardon far than thou.

CECILIA

How can that be? Yet let me take your pardon,
And that shall give me strength to say farewell.

BRACCIO

Alas! so soon? Has it then come to this?

CECILIA

'Tis better here and now; is it not, Braccio?

BRACCIO

But I may aid your flight, though I share not.
Let me be with you at the appointed hour.

CECILIA

I would not have it so.
I wish my brother only to be there,
To bring a guide and bid adieu, but not
To share my flight—no, not my brother even.

BRACCIO

So be it then.—Now listen;
This is the message which he bade me bring you.
You know the little chapel, some two miles
This side Goito, in the forest's heart,
Hard by the well and the old hermitage,
Ruined and roofless now: Saint Eustace' Well
'Tis called.

CECILIA

I know the place: oft in old times
My lonely woodland rides would bring me thither.
The hermit now is dead who then dwelt there
To tend the shrine. I well remember him:
For he would bring me water from his spring,
And I would rest awhile to hear his talk
Of the wild forest creatures, who, he said,
Were all his friends, from the tall antlered stag
To the shy conies, grown so tame, they now
Fled to their holes no more at his approach:
But most, he said, he loved the little birds,
Who shared his loaf in winter. Yet from me
He would accept no alms. Of this sweet life
Of silvan quiet, I, girlishly in love,
Would vow, when he was dead, to take his place,
There live and die: which now falls out most fit.
For there I soon must bid the world farewell.
When must I be there, Braccio?

BRACCIO

Near sunset;
About six by the clock.

CECILIA

At sunset then.
Braccio, farewell. I must not see thee more,
Not face to face alone. Then farewell now.

BRACCIO

And must we part thus, we who have loved so long?

CECILIA

Can it be otherwise?

BRACCIO

Is then thy heart so strong?
Mine cannot speak that word which thou hast spoken,
With which indifference and mere courtesy
Part coldly and forget.

CECILIA

We do not that—
Thou knowest well, nor thou nor I do that:
Not so do we part, Braccio. But alas!
Save this, the common word of all the world,
There is no other word.

BRACCIO

Then on thy lips unspoken
Thus let me lay it—

[*After a few moments' pause* CECILIA *goes out.*

BRACCIO

So sets love's star—for ever sets. To-morrow
Another takes its place, duty's pale star,
So pale, so indistinct, I must needs pray
That Heaven will grant me sight to make it out.

All my life long these two dreams have been mine
Of love the one, ambition was the other.
No thought of waking troubled them, no fear.
Surely they should have known they were but dreams.
Now I awake from sleep and find both gone,
Visions of fame and love together vanished.
I still am left orphan of Dream and Hope.
Than such a life better were dreamless death.

And have I not deserved death? What else?
Failure deserves to die, and I have failed.
My father loved no woman overmuch,
But set his heart on glory: I have loved

Vainly; now for love's bankrupt what remains?
What save this sword my father wore that day
He died at Aquila? There was no defeat,
Oh proud, audacious soul—no failure there!
The crown of Italy from thy mailèd grasp
Fate snatched away, but gave thee in its stead
That glorious death, more worth than diadems.
But I, the obscure, the scorned, the landless child
Of wrecked and vanished greatness,
Listless of glory now,
Incapable of greatness for Love's sake,
Last by Love's self dismissed, found wanting—
What and where am I, to what shame brought low!
Then with this emblem of my nobler hopes,
This sword, whereof I am proved unworthy now,
Best make an end forthwith.

And yet not so!
My death, here, in this place, would seem reproach,
Almost revenge to her. In battle then
Let death come, resolutely sought; yet seem
Destiny's casual blow, the irony
Of blind mischance. By such a death alone
Despair may be ennobled and made wise.

[BRACCIO *goes out, and* MANFREDI *comes forward.*

Poor passionate soul, that from fate's hand hast
taken
Thy mortal wound, and now with querulous agony
Criest out on death with speed to make an end!
I, though thy foe, may well befriend thee now.
It is best so. The means are sure and easy.
Her counterfeited summons shall not fail
To lure him to their trysting-place to-morrow,
Reprieved from this despair, with no suspicion;
Since to his eager credence what more natural
Than that her heart, suppressed so long, should
now
Shake off this nightmare Duty? — Thus I snare
him.
His sire died mailed in battle: let the son
At Love's feet spill his soul.—Why not?—since
Love
He worshipped more than Glory. Who shall say
Such death for him is not both best and noblest?
Failure deserves to die, so said he truly:
Yes, noble failure shall have noble death.

Why, what a fool am I,
Seeking these tender, scrupulous sophistries
To justify this necessary deed?

There is no place at all for pity here :
Or if some needs must have its way, so be it !
Such pity may be good to feel, but never
To govern or thwart action in a man.

[*As* MANFREDI *goes towards the door, the curtain falls.*

# ACT III

*A glade in the forest between Mantua and Goito. In the foreground a small hermitage and shrine, both in ruins. Beneath gushes out a spring of water.*

*Enter* LUDOVICO *and* BRACCIO.

LUDOVICO

In truth I wonder you are so perplexed.
You cannot doubt it is my sister's hand?

BRACCIO

Why, there it is: I cannot doubt her hand.
Dwarf Saladin, your father's armour-bearer,
Brought me the letter, and I know him well
To be her friend and favourite: there is none
Whom she would likelier trust with such a message.
Yet for all this I am but the more perplexed.

LUDOVICO

Nay, why this strange mistrust? Her words are
plain:
To doubt their meaning is impossible.
Have you the letter with you? Let me see it.

[BRACCIO *hands him a letter.*

She asks your pardon, and in loving terms
Implores your presence in this place to-night.

[*Reads.*

"When least I seemed to hesitate, then most
Your pleading words worked in my soul like fire.
When Love grew masterful, to master Love,
In pitiful mistaken fear of him,
With forced assurance and vain emphasis,
I made my theme of Duty, and strove so
Fatally to deceive myself and thee.
But once alone, with naught but thy last kiss,
I found my wisdom folly, and grew wise.
Now I am wholly thine. Thou wilt not fail me."

[*Gives back the letter to* BRACCIO.

BRACCIO

How is it possible that I should fail!
My Ludovico, let it not move your wonder
If I, over whose soul the waves of death

Had flowed, who had drunk so deeply of despair,
Like one recalled from swooning to life's gates,
Should apprehend things strangely for awhile,
And misinterpret with distempered eyes,
Jaundiced with doubt. And thus it was this message,
That should have given my spirit wings of gladness,
Perplexed at first, almost amazed. So strange,
So very strange it seemed to my despair
Thus on a sudden lightly to repeal,
As by an afterthought, her final doom,
Which my most passionate pleading could not shake,
To which, so oft protested and confirmed,
I bowed at length and deemed irrevocable,
Too loyal for reproach or for aught else
Save acquiescence and despair. So now
To me first waked from this fierce anguished dream,
Even this glad reassuring dawn of truth
Seemed but some treacherous flattering mockery.

LUDOVICO

Would you then doubt the truth because 'tis kind?

BRACCIO

The truth I doubt not: reason there is none,
Nor was there then, to doubt. But this change seemed
Too magical, too facile for belief.

LUDOVICO

To me indeed naught seems more natural.

BRACCIO

Her nature then is better known to you
Than 'twas to me: and yet methought I knew it;
And, though I strove against it, had small hope
To bend her steadfast will to mine. Yet now
That this against all hope has come to pass,
It were ungrateful in me so to question
This great good fortune more.
This is the place, and here
An hour from now, at sunset, we must meet.

LUDOVICO

Within the hour I bring your horses here,
Two I have chosen both for strength and speed.
There is no need for any guide save you.

BRACCIO

Not now !—You have not spoken with Cecilia ?

LUDOVICO

No, for her letter gave us strict command
To avoid her nor be seen in conference,
Lest any should suspect.

BRACCIO

I think that none
Suspect us yet.

LUDOVICO

How should they ? Now I go
To find your horses. Do not loiter here.

BRACCIO

Has not the hunt set forward now some time
On the Goito road ?

LUDOVICO

Yes ; so I think.
But who knows ? Some may still be lingering near.
Lest you be seen or sent for, 'tis more safe

That somewhere not far hence you should keep close
Till the time come: and then Heaven prosper you.

BRACCIO

Then let us now take separate ways. Farewell.

[*Exeunt*, LUDOVICO *to the right, and* BRACCIO *to the left. A moment after*, GONZAGA *and* MANFREDI *come in from the back of the stage followed by three* FORESTERS.

GONZAGA

Did you note, Beppo, who those two might be
That parted hence as we drew near? Speak low.

BEPPO (*a forester*)

The one who took yon southward path, my lord,
Was your son Ludovico.

GONZAGA

Ha! And the other?

BEPPO

My lord, 'twas Braccio.

GONZAGA

Ah! Braccio!

MANFREDI

This is the place determined in their plot.
Doubtless they came beforehand to make sure
Both know its bearings. Need you further proof?

GONZAGA

Now, Beppo,
Follow in haste with your two foresters
Along the path which Ludovico took.
Keep him in sight, and when you see your time
Seize him, and bind his hands if he resist.

BEPPO

My lord, he is your son. Shall we lay hands—

GONZAGA

Peace, hound! What! would you question my
commands?
Then at Goito keep him fast, and wait
My further orders.

BEPPO

You are obeyed, my lord.

[*Exit* BEPPO *with* FORESTERS.

GONZAGA (*turning to* MANFREDI)

Now leave me, sir; for I would have none with me
While I pluck forth the truth from these obscure
And threatening mysteries. If by the event
Your tales are justified, great recompense,
Proper for such great service, shall be yours.
But if I clear my mind of these dark clouds
Of surmise which your words have breathed therein,
If you be shown in aught to have spoken falsely,
And for malicious ends—nay if but one
Of those accused by you prove guiltless—then
On your own head must fall whatever sentence
Should else have been their due.

MANFREDI

That were but equity.
But pardon me, my lord; is it wise or safe
To trust yourself alone to this encounter,
So hazardous, of issue so momentous?

Who knows what desperate thing Braccio might do
Confronted with his guilt!
Then let me stand hard-by, though out of sight
Yet within call.

GONZAGA

No, sir; do not presume
To point me out my safety or my duty.
Go where you will, so you be far from hence.
But stay!
You said my son was to procure their horses,
And bring them here.

MANFREDI

So I o'erheard their plot.
No doubt 'twas about that he went but now.

GONZAGA

Why, without horses then there is no fear
Lest they make good their flight despite my presence.
Beppo by now has Ludovico fast.
Braccio I have no need to fear. Now go,
I care not where, so you are seen of none.

MANFREDI

I'll look to that, my lord. No man shall note me—
[*Aside.*
Not even yourself, though I stand near enough.
[*Exit* MANFREDI.

GONZAGA

Braccio a traitor! Then doth Loyalty
No more inhabit earth—a phrase, a legend,
Fabled by dreaming fools, or lying poets,
To flatter friendless monarchs. Braccio a traitor!
Is it possible—he whom with confident choice
I singled forth from all mankind, to set him
In the familiar precincts of my friendship,
Whom beyond all my kin I privileged,
Advanced and honoured—to whom my credulous love
Committed with an absolute trust the keys
Of my most secret thoughts—can this be he,
The low intriguer, who stands here unmasked
In vile conspiracy against my honour?
It cannot be; I will not think of it.
Yet why should this Manfredi—
I know him for no fool, whatever else—
Why should he, for mere love of villainy,
Or private ends of malice, I care not what,

Thus spend his wit on futile tale-bearing,
To which the next hour's question, to his cost,
Must give the lie? Some sure grounds he must have.
If it prove so—
If I convict him clearly of his guilt,
What then—what vengeance then? Yet I'll not
kill him.
I cannot shed his blood—ah no, not that—
Not take this life I cherished like a son's,
Lest some weak aftermath of tenderness
In times to come reproach me with his murder.
Let him go free with life and ignominy.
My children—Oh no more my children now—
'Tis justice I should cast them from my love
Remorselessly—mere justice too, that she
Who, to screen guilty love, could of Religion's name
Make such profane abuse, should now receive
That boon for which her hypocritic zeal
So long has sued, and, to some cloister vowed,
In forced and penitential sisterhood
There veil her shame, and end her sinful days.

The hour is almost come,
I had best withdraw and wait concealed hard-by.
But where find hiding? Midst of this broad glade
The ruined hermitage stands out alone

Bare of all neighbourhood of bush or tree.
Nowhere spreading fern or heather breaks
The turf by rabbits nibbled close and smooth.
No matter! Yonder, from the wood's dark skirt,
Though beyond earshot, I can watch them well.
To tell me truth their actions will suffice.

[*Exit to the left. After a short interval, enter* CECILIA *from the right.*

CECILIA

My brother is not here.
I am come before my time.
The sun has still some minutes ere it sink;
For though it scarce can reach this sheltered glade,
Yet still it glows in yonder beech tree tops,
And, as I hastened hither, o'er my head,
Amid the ruddy pine branches, revealed
The dancing silver of the gnats, or threads
Of floating gossamer.—Yet stay awhile,
Calm beauteous evening, hasten not thy going.
'Neath the sweet glamour of thy parting smile
My anxious heart's dejection and blind fears
Grow mild as thee. When thou art gone, too soon
Will come the doubtful, troubled night of storms;
And though once more I touch some haven's peace,
Not such as thou canst give that peace must be,
But melancholy, cloistral and austere,

Resigned and passionless, yet wistful still
Of cancelled happiness and hopes foregone.
But will not such regrets,
Such backward-facing vanities of thought,
Would they not then be sin?
I fear I am unfit—without strength yet,
Nor well prepared thus to renounce my past,
On which the convent's gates must soon close to,
Shut out for evermore. Ah, surely then
Will not my veil, which like a wedding garment
I should have donned, seem as a shroud; my cell
Comfortless, cold and cruel as a tomb.
Such life were death indeed. For such a death
Am I not yet too young, too much in love
With life's free joys, my heart scarce lately weaned
From vain things of the world—so frail even now,
So passion-tossed? Have I mistaken then
My soul's true welfare? Have I been Pride's dupe,
False Pride, that in devout and pious guise
Made fatal war against my nature's self,
Till Love was cast forth vanquished? And doth now
Even Pride fail and forsake me at the end?
What then remains? If Pride indeed be gone,
And Faith itself be lost or on the wane,
Ah, what will then be left to hold aloof

Wronged Love's reproachful ghost, returned to haunt
And tempt my vain unhallowed solitude?
Than such abasing wretchedness of sin
Far better had I then obeyed my heart's
Importunate impulse, and stooped down to drink
Love's pure and wholesome stream, that 'neath my feet
Gushed living water; but the inviting sound
Of this sweet earthly fount, that might have made
My life a present paradise, my soul
Passed by, athirst for other heavenly streams,
That spring afar on the everlasting hills,
Far beyond reach of my unworthy feet,
That now already, scarce set forth, ah me!
Stagger and faint upon their pilgrimage.

The sun has set by now. Light wanes.
My brother should come soon.
See, he draws near.
But why with such slow steps, and why alone,
Without my guide, without our horses too?
[*Enter* BRACCIO.
Ah, it is Braccio!
Then Heaven give me strength!
Braccio, what dost thou here? Is this thy faith?

BRACCIO

Obedient to thy summons am I come.

CECILIA

My summons, Braccio! When did I summon thee?
Add not such wretched falsehood to thy folly.
Be generous and depart; at once go hence;
Then for thy love's sake may I pardon thee.
Whence has thy heart conceived a hope so vain,
That I could alter from my high resolves,
Or hearken to thy pleading any more?
Doth not thy rash untimely coming hither
Mock and make vain those last farewells we took,
And wrong their tender seriousness and truth?
Stay but to ask my pardon, and with that
Leave me at once.

BRACCIO

How can I ask your pardon,
Seeing your letter brought me to this place?

CECILIA

Ah me, what letter? How canst thou persist
To say I called thee?

BRACCIO (*showing her the letter*)

Is not this your hand?

CECILIA

Why, what is this! No, no, it is not mine.
By the kind saints, I swear it is not mine.
Yet it is like my hand—most like indeed.
It must be some one has obtained my writing,
And thence contrived this cunning forgery.
Can it be Antonio?

BRACCIO

'Tis most probable.
Who else can have done this infamous thing—
what damned
Intriguing villain?

[*He flings the letter to the ground.*

CECILIA

Oh, I am sick with dread;
But most for thee. How for an instant even
Could I so doubt your noble truth and honour?
It is some enemy, it must be so,

With knowledge of our plot, I know not how,
Who thus has snared thee hither to thy ruin,
Thy death perchance. Oh Braccio, fly this place:
Fly, ere it be too late.

BRACCIO

Without thee, never.
Beside thee is my place, while there is danger.

CECILIA

Oh do not stay. If they should find thee here!
Who knows what hostile eyes those dark trees hide,
What circling ambush of drawn swords? Oh leave me!
Go without more delay.

BRACCIO

How can I leave you?
Here will I stay until your brother come.

CECILIA

Why comes he not? He should be here by now.
My heart forebodes.

BRACCIO

Can it be that those
Who wrote this letter, knowing all our plot,
Have held him back from bringing up the horses,
So to cut off our flight? That well may be,
But keep good courage still. Here is my sword,
Which, while I live, shall guard you from all wrong.

CECILIA

Wilt thou not fly alone? Ah, dost thou still
Persist for my sake, Braccio, to brave death—
For me, alas, unworthy such devotion?
Oh, how could I so wrong thy generous love's
Long-suffering truth—stubbornly set aside
Thy help and service, in refusal's spite
Ever with noble patience offered still?
Could obstinate scruples so pervert my will,
Blind pride obscure my heart so fatally,
That there should first be need, to teach me truth,
Of this thy desperate peril for my sake?
Have I found truth—truth to thyself and me—
Too late—too late for thy forgiveness?
Canst thou indeed forgive me?

[*She clings to him, while he bends over her and kisses her on the forehead.*

By this I feel I have thy pardon now.
Come, let us fly together.—See, thy star!
Love's star, and ours, as I acknowledge now!
More bright and bright each moment, see, it shines,
As though to point our way. Say, wilt thou follow?
My brother will not come.
Let us not linger here.
Haste to the forest: in its friendly glooms
Is hope of safety and escape. Haste then,
Dear Braccio, haste!

[*They turn to go, and find* GONZAGA *facing them. He has advanced quickly towards them from the trees across the grass during the last few lines. A short silence.* CECILIA *sinks on to the grass behind* BRACCIO, *and covers her face with her hands.* BRACCIO *has drawn his sword, and stands silent, facing* GONZAGA.

GONZAGA

So it is true—Manfredi spoke the truth.
Ah, miserable traitor!

Ungenerous and untrue!

[BRACCIO *seems about to speak.*

Speak no word, lest thy voice should madden me,
And I should slay thee, which I purpose not:
Though that were justice, yet I came not here
To be thy slayer. Nay, put up thy sword:

[BRACCIO *drops his sword.*

Thou shalt not need it now, save, if thou dar'st,
To end forthwith thy life and shame. But no;
For such a deed thy kind is all too base.
Surely thy knightly father's stainless sword,
Were it endued with conscious life, would turn
Against its bearer, this ignoble son
Of him, by whom 'twas once so nobly borne,
And in just retribution spill thy blood.
Go hence, thou false, ungrateful minion, go!
Thou whom I chose out blindly to my bane
For trust and honour, go dishonoured now!
Whither thou wilt take safe thy dastard's life.

[*Turning to* CECILIA.

But come, thou wretched, false, rebellious child,
Rise, follow me away; and give Heaven thanks
That I in time have saved thee from worse shame;
And that I slay not here before thine eyes
This thy would-be seducer, this base man,

With whom thou hast conspired so shamelessly
Against thy loving father, and against
His honour and thine own. Rise, come with me.

BRACCIO

Your insults on myself, I pass them by,
Since they have some apparent ground and colour.
But, sir, your daughter merits in no way
The cruel weight of this your fierce rebuke.
Have patience while I speak in her defence.
Whatever now appears, never did she
Conspire, as you suppose, to meet me here;
Nor would she ever to this place have come,
If she had thought that—

GONZAGA

Silence, insolent boy!
What, think you that I care whether forsooth
She first was thy seducer, or thou hers?
Now do your duty, girl; rise, come with me:
Come! as you hope my pardon, leave this place.

CECILIA (*rising and standing by* BRACCIO)

This place is mine beside him, while I live.

Speak to him, Braccio. Father, thou must hear.
Speak the whole truth; hide naught.

GONZAGA

Now, by God's eyes—

BRACCIO

Sir, hear me out—listen—her fault was this,
This only, that she sought by flight to gain
A cloister's refuge rather than endure
These forced and hated nuptials with the Duke.
I, as her friend, was privy to this plot:
And, freely do I own it, used all means
To urge my service as her guide and escort;
Which she, unswerving, steadfastly refused,
Denying me even this poor privilege
Of taking here my last farewell. Nor, sir,
Despite her prohibition had I come,
If I had not, by some damned villain's trick
Of writing forged to counterfeit her hand,
Been falsely summoned hither.

GONZAGA

Think not that I give credence to these false
Shuffling excuses, vain, even were they true.
Traitor thyself, prate not to me of plots.

BRACCIO

Myself I strive not now to exculpate.
Of me believe the worst, so you acquit
Her only of this disgrace and guilt, which now
Your rash unjust conception stains her with.
The letter—the forged letter!
[*Looking about him on the ground.*
It must lie somewhere near.
That will make clear her innocence.

GONZAGA

Her innocence! Even tongues of angels now
Would scarce suffice to prove her innocent.

BRACCIO

(*Lifting his sword from the grass, where it was lying at his feet, and holding it up*)

Since my mere word no longer you respect,
Then by this weapon, once the whole world's fear,
To which some reverence still you owe—by this
I swear that she is innocent: and with this
Against all men will I maintain it.

MANFREDI

(*Suddenly rushing upon* BRACCIO *from where he has been standing aside at a short distance unnoticed, and thrusting him through the body with his sword*)

Treason! treason!

What, dar'st thou lift thy sword against thy master!

[BRACCIO *falls.* CECILIA *with a cry flings herself upon his prostrate body.*

GONZAGA

Hold, hold, Manfredi! Fool, what hast thou done!

MANFREDI

'Twas well I disobeyed you, and stayed near.
He would have slain you else.

GONZAGA

No, no, he would not.
Put up your weapon, bloody, murderous dog.
[*Kneeling beside* BRACCIO.
He has hurt you, Braccio—where?

BRACCIO (*faintly*)

Care not to search my wound.
Ah, I am dying. Listen : my time is short.
Marquis, we loved each other.
Forgive us both : me if thou canst : but her
With my last breath I pray thee to forgive.
She needs forgiveness most—deserves it most.
Her love ne'er made her swerve from duty.
Mine towards thee in part made me disloyal :
Yet not so—not as thou at first didst think.
The letter ! Ah, where is that ?
Canst thou not find it ? That would show—

GONZAGA

Ah, there it lies.

MANFREDI

My lord, look to your daughter :
See, she has fainted.

[GONZAGA *turns to* CECILIA, *while* MANFREDI *stealthily snatches the letter off the ground.*

GONZAGA (*rising*)

How, sir !
What want you with that paper ? Give it me.

MANFREDI (*giving him the letter*)

That was my purpose. Here it is, my lord.
Were there more need, here doubtless you would find
Full proof and confirmation of their guilt.
But the light fails; pray, let me read it for you.

GONZAGA

I have eyes and light enough to read your crimes.

[*He holds the paper up and reads it with difficulty in the growing twilight.*

CECILIA (*who has recovered from her swoon, kneeling by* BRACCIO'S *body*)

Oh Braccio, Braccio! Ah, my life, my love!
Speak to me, speak! One word!
One word in answer to my kiss! What, none!
One look to give me hope!
Thine eyes are wide still, yet they see me not.

GONZAGA

Did you not tell me
She had resolved upon this flight with Braccio
Already when you overheard their plot?

MANFREDI

No, not resolved, yet so inclined that way
I could not doubt her mind. This letter shows
That I judged rightly.

GONZAGA

How shouldst thou know that,
Unless thine own hand forged it?
But if she wrote this, why, 'tis clear, even then
Thou didst speak false to me. But she ne'er wrote it.
Thou art a devil, a damned murdering devil!

[*Drawing his sword suddenly, and rushing on* MANFREDI, *he stabs him to the heart before he has time to defend himself.*

There, thou inhuman beast!
May fiends bear back thy wicked soul to Hell
Whence it came forth!

CECILIA

Oh, he is dead indeed—
Dead is my love, and murdered!
Can I live on without him—
Without my love, who is dead for love of me?

Let me die with him here!
His hunter's dagger!
I know he wears it hanging in his girdle.
Ah, here it is! Quick now before they come!
Love give my hands strength!—Ah!

[*While speaking these last words, she wounds herself in the breast with* BRACCIO'S *dagger. Her father returns to her side from* MANFREDI'S *body just too late to prevent her.*

GONZAGA

What hast thou done, child! Ah, hast thou slain thyself?
Thou must not die. Quick, let me staunch this blood!

CECILIA

Nay, do not staunch it, father. Let me die.

GONZAGA

No, no! thou shalt not die.
I cannot let thee die.
Thou must live still to pardon me. 'Twas I—
My cruel folly drove thee to this deed.

CECILIA

No, father; there is naught for me to pardon.

GONZAGA

Alas, I am thy murderer, and his too,
Wilfully blinded by my fatal pride!
Ah, had I known that they so loved each other!

CECILIA (*who is lying back in her father's arms*)

See, is not that his star, that shines so bright?
Already is he there? Doth he look down
Bidding me haste and come? I must not stay.

GONZAGA

Alas, poor child, poor child!

CECILIA

Ah, I have lost it now: there are so many:
The sky grows all ablaze with countless stars:
They dance and dazzle so, my eyes are weary.
Ah!
Oh look, look up! See, father, there!